

'Do something' – BESA President lays down challenge

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The new President of the [Building Engineering Services Association](#) (BESA) has called for everyone in the building services sector to “play their part” in changing the culture of construction and delivering safer and more sustainable buildings.

Pete Curtis of Briggs & Forrester has been elected to serve as President for 2025/26 and in his inaugural address asked members and the wider industry to focus on where they could influence changes to improve compliance with the Building Safety Act.

“When faced with something truly seismic, truly transformational – you have to break it down into manageable pieces,” he told his audience at the Oxo Tower in London. “For someone working in our industry, that means looking at what parts of a project or process they can influence.”

He said it was all too easy to call on the government “to do something” and, instead, urged BESA companies to sign the Association’s new Member Pledge. This involves a practical commitment “to make a better industry” by embedding individual and organisational competence into all aspects of a business’s operations and “inspiring our supply chains to do the same”.

“We do have a measure of control and influence over the people we employ both directly and indirectly – and have a responsibility to use that influence to bring about change for the better,” said Curtis.

Applications

“So we must ask ourselves: What training are we doing to address our skills shortages? Are we investing in the digital processes that can help our companies submit better planning applications, for example?

“In short, are we compliant? Is everyone who works for us competent to do the specific job for which we

have appointed them? And can we prove it? Have we rooted out behaviour that can lead to unsafe buildings?

“These are key questions for all of us,” the new President said.

Curtis has more than 35 years’ experience at [Briggs & Forrester Group](#) – one of the UK’s largest independent contractors, turning over more than £270m annually. He has worked his way up through the ranks to group services manager, reporting directly to the CEO and the board of directors, and has an impressive background in people development, contract management, and organisational performance.

A graduate of the University of Northampton, and a Fellow of the [Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development](#) (CIPD) he has long been a champion for developing future generations of craft and technical engineers and is determined to see progress on addressing the industry’s skills shortages during his presidential year.

“We have an ageing workforce with more people approaching retirement than coming into the industry. BESA members have identified this as the biggest threat to their prospects for growth,” he said during his speech.

“Many training centres have stopped delivering building services courses because of historic low demand and many suffer from a critical shortage of trainers and assessors. This is a fundamental problem that undermines any progress we make in promoting the sector to young people.”

During his presidential year, Curtis said he planned to build on the findings of a detailed study carried out by BESA into the sector’s skills requirements and would seek to grow the number of qualified trainers and assessors supporting apprenticeships through [the Association’s ‘Skills Legacy’ programme](#).

Expertise

This scheme encourages experienced engineers to “give something back to the industry” by offering their expertise to help with the delivery of apprenticeships. He pointed out that engineers often undervalued their own knowledge and experience, but said it had huge untapped value for both colleges and students.

“So, by offering to share it with a whole new generation, more mature engineers will be making an enormous contribution to the advancement of our industry,” the President said.

“And what a fantastic way to give something back when you are in the later stages of your career. I, personally, can’t think of anything more fitting for me to champion in my presidential year.”